

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER  
LISTED

APR 21 2009

## National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A) Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-9000a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name Frank J. and Harvey J. Abiah House

Other name/site number 173-11404

### 2. Location

Street & number 102-104 N. Pinecrest Avenue

☐ not for publication

City or town Wichita

☐ vicinity

State Kansas

Code KS

County Sedgwick

Code 173

Zip code 67208

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Patrick Gellmer DSHPO

3/24/09

Signature of certifying official/Title  
Kansas State Historical Society

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Signature of commenting official /Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register.  
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register

☐ removed from the National Register

☐ other, (explain:)

Ablah House  
Name of Property

Sedgwick County, Kansas  
County and State

## 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed  
in the National Register**

Residential Resources of Wichita, Kansas 1870 - 1957

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter Categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling: duplex

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling: duplex

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: CONCRETE  
Walls: BRICK

STUCCO

Roof: OTHER: Rolled material for flat roofs

Other: GLASS: glass brick

## Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Ablah House  
Name of Property

Sedgwick County, Kansas  
County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register)

- ☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- ☒ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

### Period of Significance

1939-1957

### Significant Dates

1939

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

ABLAH, Frank J.; ABLAH, Harvey J.

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Frank J. Ablah and Harvey J. Ablah, Contractors

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
# \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering

### Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☒ Local government
- ☒ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Ablah House  
Name of Property

Sedgwick County, Kansas  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .38 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	4	6	5	2	0	5	0	4	1	7	2	2	6	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						
2														

3														
Zone		Easting						Northing						
4														

☐ See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name/title Barbara R. Hammond, Planning Analyst

Organization Historic Preservation Office, City of Wichita Date 7/23/2007

Street & number 455 N. Main Street Telephone 316-268-4421

City or town Wichita State KS Zip code 67202

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

Name Marc Turman

Street & number 102 N. Pinecrest Telephone 316-942-3208 (w) 316-841-0815 (h)

City or town Wichita State KS Zip code 67208

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503



Franks and Harvey)  
Ablah House  
102-04 N. Pinecrest  
Z 145  
E 652050  
N 4172260

4173  
(ANDOVER)  
6559 11 NW  
4172  
LINWOOD ACRES 2.6 MI.  
EL DORADO 32 MI.  
40'  
EAST WICHITA INTERCHANGE 1.3 MI.  
EL DORADO INTERCHANGE 22 MI.  
T. 27 S.  
T. 28 S.  
4168

MINNEHA

WICHITA  
AVENUE

Cessna Aircraft  
Airport

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

<u>Section 7</u>	<u>Page 1</u>	<u>Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House</u>	<u>Sedgwick County, Kansas</u>
		<u>Name of property</u>	<u>County and State</u>

Brothers Frank and Harvey Ablah, owners of a prosperous family business, built the residence at 102-104 N. Pinecrest in the Crown Heights neighborhood in 1939. The two-story house is unusual because it was built expressly for their two families as a duplex. Beyond being just a duplex, it was a dual house for the Ablah family that allowed two private living spaces complemented by a communal area. The physical space of the residence epitomizes the close-knit family that lived and worked together in Wichita for over 90 years.

The style reflects Wichita's cultural and commercial interest in the modern age of automobiles, aviation, and architecture during the growth period of the 1920s. To date, less than ten residential structures in the Art Moderne style have been identified in Wichita. Such scarcity lends an air of eccentricity and makes this house unique.

### Setting

The Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House is located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Pinecrest and Douglas Avenues. Pinecrest is in Crown Heights, a compact residential neighborhood that retains its original street plan, density of houses, setbacks, and landscaping. About three-fourths of the neighborhood was platted and developed between 1910 and 1940, which brought the eastern City Limits to Wheeler Avenue (now Edgemoor). The housing stock is principally brick Cotswold cottages, Cape Cod cottages, and vernacular two-story houses. Infill of Minimal Traditional-style houses occurred during the World War II era and filled out the north and south ends of the neighborhood after the war.

The only major change to the layout of the neighborhood is the loss of about nine original blocks of residences that were demolished in the 1980s for expansion of Kellogg Avenue (US 400) on the southern edge of the area.

The neighborhood is bounded on the north and south by Central and Kellogg Avenues respectively, and on the east and west by Edgemoor and Oliver Streets respectively. Douglas Avenue, a main east-west corridor in Wichita bisects the neighborhood. The Lincoln Heights Village shopping center (1949) anchors the Crown Heights neighborhood with a group of small, locally owned businesses at the intersection of Oliver Street and Douglas Avenue. Retail, service, and fast-food businesses are situated to the north on the Central Avenue border. The neighborhood contains one elementary school, one middle school, and one major denomination church.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7    Page 2    Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House  
Name of property

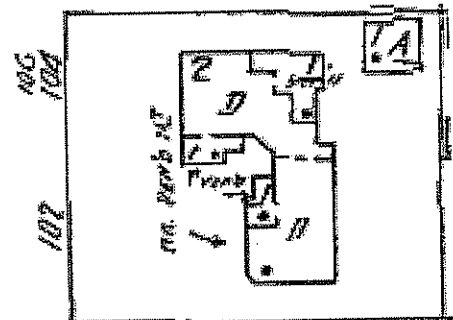
Sedgwick County, Kansas  
County and State

Architectural Overview

The Ablah House is a two-story duplex residence that incorporates all the major characteristics of the Art Moderne/Streamline Moderne architectural style. Although prevalent in commercial and public buildings, this style is uncommon in Wichita housing stock.

The house is also uncommon because the sophisticated design was apparently carried out without the services of an architect. In 1936, when brothers Frank and Harvey Ablah purchased the land, their Hotel Supply Company was in the business of manufacturing fixtures for restaurant interiors. Combining that familiarity with their past experience in the manufacture of metal diner buildings, they were able to apply those construction techniques to a large structure such as this house. Thus, they had designers, woodworking, and metalworking employees with the expertise to build most of the house. The Ablahs started with a rendered drawing by an unknown draftsman that was based on their ideas, and they acted as their own contractors to get the house built. This was a cost-saving device that exemplified their thrifty habits and shrewd business sense.<sup>1</sup> The result was a high-style residence that represented the futuristic fashions of their era.

The house, which is situated on a corner lot, is built in two intersecting units on a plan that is neither L or U-shaped under a flat roof. There is no visible foundation above grade. Architectural forms are repeated between the two units, but are not symmetrically placed on the structure as a whole. The two living units contain similar rooms and interior features, but are not exact mirror images of each other.



Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, 1950

Smooth surfaces typify the Moderne style and emphasize the fluid lines of a structure. The Ablahs achieved this in an unusual way.

The ground floor wall surface is variegated brick, but the upper façade is clad in metal sheeting and painted with silica-textured paint. Horizontality is carried out on the brick surface by a lintel course and another soldier course near the base of the walls that continues through the brick chimney bases. The lines are repeated in four metal bands on the second floor surface that function physically to cover the seams and aesthetically tie the windows together on the horizontal plane; a parapet band completes the effect. The original metal bands were chrome, however Grandmother Nellie and daughter-in-law Nellie

<sup>1</sup> Personal Communication, Donald Ablah to Barbara Hammond, Wichita Historic Preservation Office, Aug 28, 2007; Amil Ablah to Barbara Hammond, Aug. 30, 2007.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7	Page 3	Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House	Sedgwick County, Kansas
		Name of property	County and State

considered it garish and later ordered them painted, as they remain today.<sup>2</sup> All windows on the house have original metal trim.

Streamline Moderne derives its name from the progression of transportation technology that began in the 1920s and culminated in the 1950s. As speed and flight developed, sleek forms were necessary for efficiency and came to be accepted as beautiful design, both in the transportation industry and in immobile architectural structures. In the Ablah House, rounded corners emphasize the effect of motion, which is enhanced by bands of windows, windows that wrap around corners, and windows filled in with glass blocks that seem to create translucent walls. Porthole windows and round chimney pots echo the absence of hard-edged corners. Frank and Harvey intended to emulate a ship-like appearance to the building and original, fixed wood shutters on the second floor windows were embellished with cutout boat motifs.<sup>3</sup>

The most dramatic effect of fluidity is seen in the overall undulation of the complete structure. The two living units join at a right angle to form the complete residential structure of 6,121 square feet of living space. In this arrangement the two main units wrap around the center entrance. Obviously, the chimneys are necessarily vertical, but their contrasting forms act as a design relief, giving the effect of stabilizing or lightly containing the horizontal flowing lines.

#### West Elevation (Front)

The front of the house actually contains a segment of south-facing elevation, but for ease of description that portion is included as a part of the total west elevation unit due to the L-shaped façade. One of the two chimneys is positioned on the west, left elevation.

A series of ten 15-light, and one 5-light fixed windows on the ground floor follow the wrap-around façade and are accented by four multi-light fixed windows containing nearly 100 glass blocks each. The glass block windows are set into four prominent curved corners of the structure. This band of windows on the ground floor creates a base for a series of single, double, and triple one-over-one sash windows on the second floor level. The variation in these window pairings gives slight asymmetry within the horizontal balance of the first and second stories.

Double glass doors form a common, central front entrance, which is tucked into the interior corner at the meeting point of the two residential wings. Although visible, its location forms a slightly secluded small

<sup>2</sup> D. Ablah; A. Ablah, Aug 2007.

<sup>3</sup> D. Ablah, Aug 28, 2007.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

<u>Section 7</u>	<u>Page 4</u>	<u>Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House</u>	<u>Sedgwick County, Kansas</u>
		<u>Name of property</u>	<u>County and State</u>

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courtyard. The front entrance opens into a foyer, beyond which is a common room for joint family activities. The entrances to each of the independent units are accessed from the foyer; each unit also has a private exterior front entrance adjacent to the center entrance. Two porthole windows also draw attention to this entrance.

The house is only one-story high in this center front section, which is set against the backdrop of the two-story height that spans the entire house, again achieving a slight variety without upsetting the horizontal lines. These one-story roofs are enclosed with solid parapet walls that afforded private, summer sleeping porches for the children of the family.

A diagonal driveway divides the house from the front yard and streets and gives access to the front entrance from both Pinecrest and Douglas Avenues.

#### North Elevation (Side)

The north elevation faces an east-west lying driveway. Again, a variation in height between one-story and two-story segments adds to the undulating effect of the structure. Window placement includes two 15-light fixed windows, two single one-over-one sash windows and a paired one-over-one sash window. A low stoop at the driveway's edge accesses the rear entrance to this north residential unit.

#### East Elevation (Rear)

An original attached, and partially enclosed, carport on the northeast corner of the house is accessed from the north driveway.

Window placement on the east elevation consists of single and double one-over-one sash windows on lower and upper floors and one small fixed window on the ground floor. Additional parapet-enclosed rooftops are accessed from the second floor on the rear of the house.

#### South Elevation (Side)

The south elevation is marked by the second of two chimneys, which is flanked by two small one-over-one sash windows at the ground floor level; one larger window of the same style is at the left of the chimney on the second floor. A pair of double one-over-one sash windows at right balances the glass brick window on the ground floor left.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

<u>Section 7</u>	<u>Page 5</u>	<u>Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House</u>	<u>Sedgwick County, Kansas</u>
		<u>Name of property</u>	<u>County and State</u>

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**Interior**

The north residence, which was occupied by Frank Ablah's family, contains five bedrooms and two bathrooms because Grandmother Nellie Ablah lived with them. Her bedroom was on the ground floor because she was an invalid. They called the common room the "sun room" and Nellie used it as a sitting room to visit with her various family members. Harvey Ablah's family lived in the south residence, which contains three bedrooms and two bathrooms.

With the exception of the kitchens, which have been updated with new cabinetry, fixtures, and flooring, and a slight re-configuration of an earlier partition wall on the second floor that separates the two residences, the architectural integrity of the house is intact throughout the interior of the structure and contributes to the significance of the building.

Two bathrooms (one in each residence) that are similar, but not identical, have original pink tile bordered with unique gold metallic tiles and geometrically shaped medicine cabinet mirrors that match the tile formation. Bathtubs are original; other fixtures have been updated.

The living rooms and dining rooms of both residences are dominated by the glass block windows and curved corners that exemplify Art Moderne styling in the interior as well as the exterior of the structure. A dramatic addition to the effect is the extra wide cove molding crowning the walls of these rooms. The property owner has emphasized the sleek style with glossy metallic paint on the molding.

A double-glass door has replaced the original door at the common front entry, but the wood doors with fixed light windows that give access to the individual residences are original. The original window and door trim is evident in every room, banisters are preserved, and arched doorways in the main living areas are typical of the time period. Other distinctive features include built-in linen closets, pass-through letterboxes, and the newel post in the south residence contains a pipe rack to accommodate the man of the house.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8	Page 6	Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House	Sedgwick County, Kansas
		Name of property	County and State

The **Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House** at 102-104 N. Pinecrest Avenue in Wichita, Kansas is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Residential Resources of Wichita, Kansas – 1870-1957 under **Criterion B** for its association with its original owners, brothers Frank and Harvey Ablah. The Ablah brothers were Lebanese Christian immigrants whose Middle Eastern heritage guided their assimilation into American society and shaped their joint contribution to commerce and trade in Wichita. Their double-residence was built in 1939. The Ablah families owned the house from that time until the death of the surviving matriarch, Leona Ablah, in 1996.

The residence is also nominated under **Criterion C** in the area of Architecture as an excellent example of the Art Moderne style represented in a rare double residence.

### Historic Context

Technological advancements of the 1920s through World War II, combined with population growth, and economic prosperity immediately following the war influenced the next decade of architecture, particularly in industrial and public buildings that required large spaces for manufacturing, warehouse storage, and display. While the era of bungalow houses provided relief from the fussy Victorian-era decorative styles and provided convenient, affordable housing for middle-income families, so also was commercial and industrial architecture in need of a change, namely in larger, and stronger buildings than those of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It found a solution in modern styling that abandoned high ornamentation and customary materials for plain surfaces, simple lines, and new structural forms. Modernism presented a new way of thinking about architecture, applying analytical methods to design. Gerald Foster, author of *American Houses*, explains: "The heavy masonry construction of neoclassical or late Gothic styles was impractical and expensive; Victorian and Georgian motifs were obviously limited in scale and structural capacity. New designs in new materials – concrete, steel frame, and glass – provided rational, well-lighted, flexible, and efficient space. Buildings needed to be relatively quick to erect, enclosing large, clear-span and high-rise spaces."<sup>1</sup>

Wichita architects responded to the Modernist movement by designing many brick and stucco buildings that employed the streamlined forms popularized by the automobile, railroad, and aviation industries. During, and immediately after the war, Wichita's economy flourished under the aviation industry, led by Boeing, Beechcraft, and Cessna aircraft companies and the small manufacturing companies that supported them. This theme became so fashionable that it carried over into other cultural items including household appliances, office furnishings and even clothing fashions. After the war surplus materials from aviation manufacturing encouraged the use of metals and polished surfaces in civilian articles. Thus, the horizontal, flowing lines, and smooth steel and glass surfaces that represented flight and speed were the

<sup>1</sup> Gerald Foster, *American Houses, A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2004), 355.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8

Page 8

Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House  
Name of property

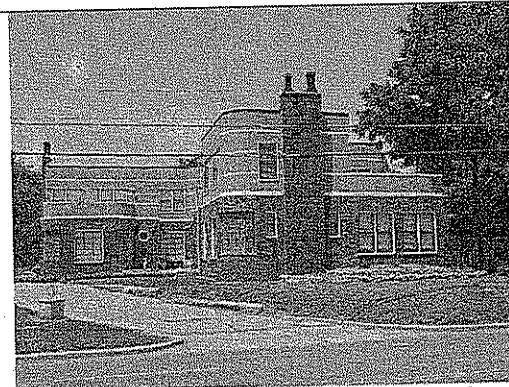
Sedgwick County, Kansas  
County and State

apartment buildings, as seen in the Bois-Roussel Apartments (1940) 445 N. Emporia. Extant), the Riviera Plaza Apartments (1947, 1318-1322 Stackman. Extant), and the DeWeese Apartments (1942, 3444 E. Douglas. Extant). Also, architect Garrold Griffin, who designed his Art Moderne office building at 416 S. Market (1940) added a second floor apartment a few years later that fully incorporated the streamline styling of the first floor office.



617 N. Bluff, 2004. Property of Wichita Metro Area Planning Dept.

A single-family residence at 617 N. Bluff exhibits the style in modest proportions. The plain stucco walls are ornamented with horizontal banding. The roof is flat; the proportions are asymmetrical, but the house is without any rounded elements.



102-104 N. Pinecrest, 2006. Property of Wichita Metro Area Planning Dept.

In contrast, the Ablah house represents Art Moderne in the high style. Not only does the house make a unique statement in Wichita residential architecture, but it is a custom-designed double house adapted to the specific needs of the owners. It fits the site; it fits the extended family.

As Wichita outgrew the Victorian-era neighborhoods north of the city center, most prosperous citizens favored an eastward movement along Douglas Avenue. Two miles east of the downtown core, the College Hill neighborhood offered an attractive site on a height of land overlooking the Arkansas River valley. This neighborhood developed from 1910 through the 1920s. By 1929 land another mile east had been platted to the City Limits at Oliver Street. The 1930s decade opened with the platting of more land east of Oliver. When building resumed after the lull of the Depression era, drift eastward continued along Douglas Avenue in the direction of the exclusive Eastborough Village, which was still separated from Wichita by farmland. Contractors and real estate developers continued buying tracts and building pattern book houses for speculative sale. The construction costs of these houses from 1929 to 1939 ranged between \$3400 and \$6000.<sup>3</sup> Most are brick veneer, 1 or 1 1/2-story cottages with Tudor Revival or Cape Cod features. Several two-story houses are intermittently distributed among the smaller houses.

In 1936 the Easthill Addition was platted between Pinecrest and State Street (now Old Manor Road) and

<sup>3</sup> Wichita City Building Permits Card File. Wichita Metropolitan Area Planning Department (MAPD), 455 N. Main Street, 10th floor. Wichita KS.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8	Page 9	Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House	Sedgwick County, Kansas
		Name of property	County and State

between Douglas Avenue and First Street. The Ablah House at 102-104 N. Pinecrest is at the southwest corner of this plat and 3 miles east of the city center. Subsequent plats filled in the 1/8 square mile and completed the new residential neighborhood to the relocated city limits at Wheeler Avenue (now Edgemoor).

Due to earlier platting of Parrott Addition of 1930, a few houses with garages were built at 205, 235, and 255 N. Pinecrest at costs of \$10,000, \$7500, and \$9000. Building permit #7751 was issued for 102-104 N. Pinecrest on September 4, 1939, however no estimated cost for the house is recorded.<sup>4</sup> Comparison to the three 1930 permits in the 200 block would infer that the much larger Ablah double-house-with-garage, built nine years later, was constructed at a considerably higher cost. The east side of Pinecrest was built up between 1937 and 1939, including the Ablah House. The west side of the street was built up from 1939 to 1942.

The Ablahs selected their new location in a neighborhood of middle to upper-middle income families whose occupations in 1941 included a mechanical engineer, salesmen, business managers, oil "operators", and one church custodian living next door to the Executive Secretary of the Wichita Board of Trade.<sup>5</sup> Also, Frank and Lorena Addis, another Lebanese immigrant family that operated a grocery business owned a house at 120 N. Pinecrest.

### Lebanese Immigrants in the United States

In the late 19th century, Arabic-speaking immigrants joined the waves of Europeans who sought new prospects in the United States. Although not the first Middle Easterners to come to the new land, the Syrian (now known as Lebanese) migrants of 1880 to 1930 discovered profitable opportunities by applying their cultural experience with merchandising to the business of pack peddling.<sup>6</sup> As individuals and in family groups, they dispersed throughout the country, establishing small sales territories for themselves, selling their goods door-to-door, farm-to-farm until each had gained enough wealth to set up permanent retail and wholesale businesses in towns and cities.

Kansas attracted many of these immigrants, with large numbers of them settling in Wichita between 1910 and 1940. These immigrants were Christians of the Eastern-rite sects, predominately Eastern Orthodox.<sup>7</sup> They originated in the Mount Lebanon locality in the province of Syria, which was historically within a larger, imprecise geographical area known as the Levant. The Levant was bounded by the Mediterranean

<sup>4</sup> Wichita City Building Inspection Logbook. MAPD.

<sup>5</sup> *Wichita City Directories*. Wichita, R.L. Polk & Co. 1939, 1941.

<sup>6</sup> Alixa Naff, *Becoming American, The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Philip M. Kayal and Joseph M. Kayal, *The Syrian-Lebanese in America* (Boston, MA: Twayne Publishers, A Division of G.K. Hall & Co., 1975), 25.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8	Page 10	Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House	Sedgwick County, Kansas
		Name of property	County and State

on the west and the Arabian Desert (now Iraq and Saudi Arabia) and Upper Mesopotamia (now Iran) on the east and was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire. Also known as the Turkish Empire, this dynastic body (1299-1922) spanned three continents at the height of its power and controlled much of southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Due to the long history of upheavals, rivalries, wars, occupations, conquests, and distances, localities such as Mount Lebanon existed under their own administrative units according to their regional characteristics. Thus the Ottoman Empire contained no one language, religion, or singular history, but rather many diverse Arab cultures.

When these Middle Easterners left their homelands they did not identify with a defined geographic nation in the way that Westerners do.<sup>8</sup> This lack of attachment to a land-based, political nation-state caused confusion when they were admitted to the United States and were required to declare their national birthplaces for documents like the annual census.

The ethnicity of immigrants we know as Lebanese is difficult to delineate. No one religion, national identity, or singular history defines all Arab peoples.<sup>9</sup> Thus it is not easy to tally the numbers of Lebanese immigrants by nationality because the census records contain many different answers for the question of birthplace. Language difficulties and ignorance on the part of the enumerators probably added to the confusion. The group that is now known as Lebanese did not use that term until the 1930s. The Ottoman Empire ended in 1917 and in 1920 Lebanon became French Mandate; in 1943 Lebanon achieved independent statehood. Until that time immigrants to Kansas are documented as having various national connections, such as Turkey, Arabia, or Syria. In the 1920 Census, Wichitan Jabbour Ablah claimed (or was assigned) that he was born in Jerusalem, and his mother tongue was Syrian, which the enumerator spelled "Serian".<sup>10</sup>

For purposes here, the modern term *Lebanese* will be used throughout to refer to the Orthodox Christian immigrants that arrived in Wichita, Kansas from Syria, a region that included present-day nations of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Israel.

Due to their status as newly arrived immigrants in a foreign land, and to their cultural orientation toward spiritual and family-based social systems, the Lebanese in Wichita founded a tightly knit community that was located on the west side of the Arkansas River, centered along Douglas Avenue. There they organized themselves around their Christian life and family connections. According to Kayal and Kayal, "The typical Middle Easterner sees his family as an extension of himself, and his religious grouping

<sup>8</sup> Kayal, *Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 25.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, analysis of birthplaces in totals is made now more indefinite by current changes in terminology by the authors of Ancestry.com, a well-regarded genealogy database. They apply the term "Syrian Arab Republic" for immigrants who claim Syria as birthplace, but it is not known how many other nation-states are included in this designation.

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

<u>Section 8</u>	<u>Page 11</u>	<u>Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House</u> <u>Name of property</u>	<u>Sedgwick County, Kansas</u> <u>County and State</u>
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The Wichita Lebanese brought with them this tradition of the *millet*<sup>12</sup> system of government, reinforcing their solidarity with their religious leaders in their new country. As in other parts of the U.S., the Lebanese in Wichita organized their community with homes, businesses, churches, schools, and fraternal organizations.<sup>13</sup> The following quotation illustrates the close relationship between the immigrants and their local religious leaders. When Elias Stevens expanded his tobacco and candy business by opening a new wholesale warehouse in 1937, he received these comments in a letter from the Very Reverend N.A. Nahas, Archpriest, Dean of St. Mary's Orthodox Church in Wichita.

Dear Mr. E.G. Stevens,

Upon your opening day I wish to send you my congratulations. Maybe I am one of those very few who knows your family history which we, the Syrians, who are descendants of the Phoenicians, are proud of your family's clear history. It is not much [<sup>?14</sup>] to see their Grand-Child, E.G. Stevens, writing their name in our new mother land, United States. May God bless all Stevens to keep up the Syrian-Phoenician name in Wichita merchant history.

Yours in Christ,  
Rev. N.A. Nahas

Christians in the Mount Lebanon area of the Middle East were generally progressive and combined their farming occupation with sales of their produce.<sup>15</sup> This expertise as merchants was the basis for their economic advancement in the United States.

In spite of the demanding physical work and potential for harassment, discrimination, and danger, pack peddling offered advantages that appealed to the Lebanese. It allowed them to operate on their own terms

<sup>11</sup> Kayal, *Syrian-Lebanese in America*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Millet System: The Ottoman government charged local religious leaders with the responsibility to act as intermediaries for the government in matters such as taxation and for civil behavior in their communities. *Religion and Societies: Asia and the Middle East*. 1982:175. <http://books.google.com/books>. Accessed Oct 24, 2007.

13 Kelly Caswell, *Lebanese Immigration into Wichita, Kansas: 1890s to 1940*. MA Thesis, Wichita State University. 1996:2.

<sup>14</sup> Author's note: Disjointed phrase probably indicates an immigrant's unfamiliarity with the English language.

<sup>15</sup> Caswell, *Lebanese Immigration*, 6.



**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 13 Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House  
Name of property

Sedgwick County, Kansas  
County and State

The Ablah Family

Note: Unfamiliarity with ethnic names led to variations in the spelling of Ablah family names through phonetic, anglicized, and typographical errors in City Directories, Census data, and newspaper articles.

Ethnic Name	Americanized Name	Variations on spellings in U.S. Census, Wichita City Directories, Birth/Wedding/Death records:
Ablah		Abalah
Jabbour:	J.S.	Jabour, George
Khushsa	Nellie	Nelly
Fauzie:	Frank	Phosie, Faouzi
Hafiz	Harvey	Hoffey
Haseba	Helen	Haseeba, Hasiba, Haseva, Esseba, Elsiva, Sevia

Brothers Fauzie (Frank) and Hafiz (Harvey) Ablah immigrated to the United States through Canada in 1907 with their parents, Jabbour S. and Khushsa (Nellie) Ablah, and their sister Haseba (Helen).<sup>19</sup> The boys were 14 and 10 years old respectively, Haseba was 7. The Ablahs first located on the west side of Wichita<sup>20</sup>, among other Lebanese immigrant families, and lived in rooms at 1105 W. Douglas, 1109 W. Douglas, and 351 N. Handley Street.<sup>21</sup> Jabbour developed a country peddling business, taking a territory in Marion County. He regularly took the train to the vicinity of Florence, Kansas and traveled his route.<sup>22</sup>

At that time there were approximately thirty families totaling about 200 "Syrians", as they were known, living in West Wichita. Nearly all of them began working as peddlers, gradually achieving storefront retail businesses. Also, several families had established three wholesale supply houses selling novelties, dry goods, and imports to agents working in southern Kansas and Oklahoma.<sup>23</sup> Family patriarchs soon sent for relatives in the homeland to help in their growing family-run businesses. This success enabled the Wichita Lebanese Christian community to expand rapidly over the first four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Lebanese penchant for business ownership fit well with the entrepreneurial spirit that marked Wichita's development from its early years. Despite certain racially discriminatory attitudes, Wichitans on the whole recognized the value of their business expertise and they assimilated well into the community.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Wichita Eagle*, Feb. 4, 1991:3C.

<sup>20</sup> The Arkansas River divided Wichita physically and socially at that time.

<sup>21</sup> Census of the United States, Wichita, Sedgwick County, Kansas. Department of Commerce and Labor. 1908, 1909, 1910.

<sup>22</sup> *Wichita City Directories*, 1909, 1910; Personal Communication: Donald Ablah to Barbara Hammond, Wichita Historic Preservation Office. Aug 28, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> "Wichita's Syrian Colony is Happy and Prosperous", *Wichita Eagle*, Jan 16, 1910:10A.

<sup>24</sup> Caswell, *Lebanese Immigration*, 53.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

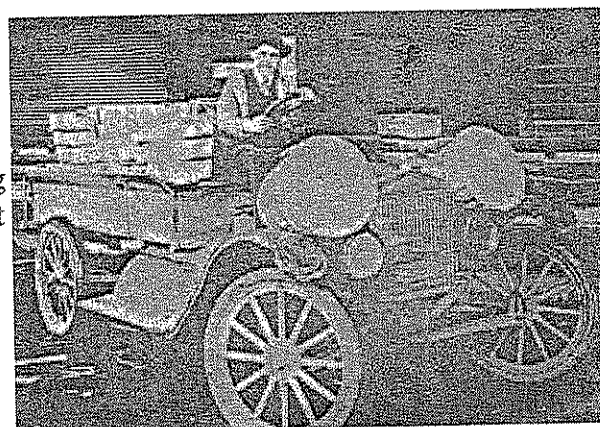
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8    Page 14    Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House  
Name of property

Sedgwick County, Kansas  
County and State

In 1911 Jabbour Ablah broke with the clustered settlement tradition of the ethnic community and moved his family east across the river to open Ablah Dry Goods, Clothing & Fancy Work, a mercantile business at 1420 E. Douglas Avenue (demolished). This bold social move also marked the beginning of a 60-year family business that would have a significant effect on Wichita.

Because the business was in a one-story building, Jabbour, Khushsa, and the children lived in the back room of the store.<sup>25</sup> As was common to their culture, the three children and their mother worked in the father's business.<sup>26</sup> In keeping with the immigrants' appreciation for education, 19-year-old Frank enrolled as a student at Wichita Business College.<sup>27</sup> By 1915 Jabbour acquired the two-story building next door at 1418 E. Douglas (demolished) and moved his business to the ground floor storefront; the family moved to quarters on the second floor. However, they soon moved again (1916), this time to a two-story house in a residential neighborhood at 504 Ellis Avenue (demolished).



Harvey Ablah c. 1918.

Sons Fauzie and Hafiz were now designated as co-owners with Jabbour of the newly named Ablah Mercantile Company. They operated at the Douglas Avenue location until 1920, as well as a second store at 202 N. Main during 1917 and 1918.<sup>28</sup> In 1920 the men moved the business again to their 40-year location at 205-207 N. Water Street. During this time period Fauzie and Hafiz Americanized their names to Frank and Harvey, to better assimilate into the Wichita business community. Throughout their lives they strove to shed the "immigrant" stereotype and to blend into the local culture.<sup>29</sup> Haseba, who had worked as a cashier for her father, took her place with her brothers as the Assistant Manager of the business in 1922. The family changed the name of the business to Ablah Wholesale Grocery Company in 1923 and finally in 1928 to Ablah Hotel Supply which eventually turned from food to equipment and small wares, to the manufacture of restaurant interiors.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Author unknown. "The Golden Who's Who of the Lebanese Emigrants in the World". <http://www.rootsweb.com/~lbnwgv/whosiwho/cities/wichita.htm>. Accessed May 9, 2007. Accessed May 9, 2007; New York, Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, Map 1914, Sheet 12.

<sup>26</sup> Caswell, *Lebanese Immigration*, 80.

<sup>27</sup> *Wichita City Directory*, 1913.

<sup>28</sup> *Wichita City Directories*, 1915-1920.

<sup>29</sup> D. Ablah, Aug 28, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> *Wichita City Directories*, 1920-1930; "The Golden Who's Who". Accessed May 9, 2007; D. Ablah, Aug 28, 2007.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8	Page 15	Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House	Sedgwick County, Kansas
		Name of property	County and State

In 1922 Haseba Ablah married Adeeb Andeel. Adeeb had emigrated at the age of seven years in 1902 from Syria to Oklahoma with his family.<sup>31</sup> He took his bride back to Okmulgee, Oklahoma in 1924, but in 1936 the couple returned to Wichita and took up residence at 512 Ellis Avenue, just two houses away from Haseba's family. Adeeb Andeel established his own career in sales as the lifetime owner of Andeel Vending Machine Company.

In the entrepreneurial spirit that characterized the family, Harvey Ablah, who specialized in sales, and Frank, who handled administrative tasks, pursued a side business in the 1934. For the previous fifteen years, small hamburger lunchrooms had been springing up in Wichita, best identified by the popular White Castle System, which originated there. White Castle purchased prefabricated porcelain steel buildings in which to sell their "sliders", coffee, and pie. Seeing an opportunity, albeit risky, the Ablahs established their own competitive portable steel building business.<sup>32</sup> They complemented this venture with a chain of 27 "Little Palace" and "White Crown" lunchrooms throughout Kansas and Oklahoma. When World War II rationing created availability problems with materials and gasoline, Harvey and Frank sold the cafes to local individuals. Arthur Valentine, owner of another lunchroom chain and an Ablah client, bought the steel building business from the Ablahs and eventually developed the well known Valentine Diners and subsidiary companies that operated until 1952.<sup>33</sup>

Frank and Harvey continued to combine their skills at business management and divide their enterprises 50-50 through several more decades.<sup>34</sup> Ablah Hotel Supply Company survived a significant fire in 1941 and operated on north Water Street until they moved the business to 800 E. 11<sup>th</sup> Street in 1959 to make way for a new venture.<sup>35</sup> In 1960 the Ablah brothers demolished the structure at 205 N. Water and began to erect the 9-story Colorado Derby Building. At the same time, in a complicated real estate arrangement, they donated the land and future building to Wichita University. To that date it was the largest gift ever made to the university, with an anticipated value of \$2.5 million. The university planned to finance a new library with the revenue generated by the office building.<sup>36</sup> The university honored the Ablah families by naming the building Ablah Library at its opening in November, 1962. Frank and Harvey retired from Ablah Hotel Supply, sold the company in 1974, and continued to invest in real estate.

### 102-104 N. Pinecrest

Family patriarch Jabbour S. Ablah died in 1930 but the remaining family continued to live together in the

<sup>31</sup> New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957. Ship's Manifest, "La Champagne", Dec 1902. <http://www.ancestry.com>. Accessed Aug 20, 2007.

<sup>32</sup> D. Ablah, Aug 28, 2007.

<sup>33</sup> "Valentine Diner Businesses." Kansas State Historical Society, <http://www.kshs.org>. Accessed June 14, 2007.

<sup>34</sup> "The Golden Who's Who" Accessed May 9, 2007.

<sup>35</sup> "Wichita Blaze Loss \$150,000." *Wichita Eagle*. Apr 24, 1941:1.

<sup>36</sup> "Pioneer Family Here Gives Building to WU; To Pay for New Library." *Wichita Eagle*. Mar 8, 1960:1.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8	Page 16	Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House	Sedgwick County, Kansas
		Name of property	County and State

same household, even after Frank and Harvey were married. Eventually the extended family included Jabbour's widow, Nelly (Khushsa) Ablah; sons and daughters-in-law Frank and Nellie, and Harvey and Leona; plus grandchildren Lucile, George, Donald, Amil, Geraldine, Marsha, and Patricia. Most of them lived in the Ellis Avenue house until 1939 when they built the new double house at 102-104 N. Pinecrest; some of the grandchildren were born in the new house.

Although the new house was designed with separate addresses, entrances, and living quarters for Frank's and Harvey's families, their cohesiveness continued. The men were in business together, the women ran the households and the seven cousins shared equally as brothers and sisters would have done. A room at the center of the house provided a place for family gatherings.<sup>37</sup> Family continuity was kept intact when the Ablahs left Ellis Avenue because Adeeb and Haseba Andeel moved to a new house at 204 N. Pinecrest.<sup>38</sup> There they raised seven children, Leenda, Marjorie, Beverly, Deanna, Lindy, Stanley, and Ronald, within a convenient, one-block distance from their Ablah cousins and grandmother.<sup>39</sup>

Khushsa Ablah lived with her sons Frank and Harvey until she died in 1953. Frank J. Ablah died in 1986, his wife Nellie Farha Ablah died in 1980. Harvey J. Ablah died in 1991, his wife Leona Razook Ablah died in 1996.

Jabbour Ablah's relocation to Ellis Avenue successfully juxtaposed Lebanese Christian values of family-as-community and American values of upward mobility. They left the communal, immigrant-based neighborhood on the west side of Wichita for an expanded business environment in the central downtown business district on the east side of the river and set up residence nearby. Their integration into the east side of Wichita was justified culturally by the fact that the Ablahs took their family community and ties to their Orthodox Christian Church with them to the new location.

Frank and Harvey's relocation to Pinecrest Avenue signaled further assimilation within the rising social environment of east Wichita. Their wealth and stature in the business community enabled them to assume a position in a new neighborhood. By the 1940s many second- and third-generation Lebanese Christians had begun to leave the original ethnic community in the West Douglas/South Seneca neighborhood. Suburban development in Wichita called to the naturalized, college-educated, and financially successful children of the first generation just as it did to middle class families of all backgrounds in many American cities.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> "The Ablahs: The Early Years", *Wichita Eagle-Beacon*. Aug 12, 1984:6A.

<sup>38</sup> *Wichita City Directories, 1923-1951*; Building Permits Card File, MAPD.

<sup>39</sup> "Adeeb E. Andeel Dead at Age 72", *Wichita Eagle/Wichita Beacon* (?) Jan 8/9, 1966.

<sup>40</sup> Caswell, *Lebanese Immigration*, 73-76.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

<u>Section 8</u>	<u>Page 17</u>	<u>Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House</u>	<u>Sedgwick County, Kansas</u>
		<u>Name of property</u>	<u>County and State</u>

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**Summary**

The Ablah House is nominated as part of the Residential Resources of Wichita (1870-1957) Multiple Property Submission. It falls within the Multi-Family Property Type as a duplex and relates to both historic contexts outlined in the MPDF – “Residential Development of Wichita 1870-1957” and “Multi-Family Residential Development 1900-1957.” Specifically, the property is eligible under Criterion C for its architecture as an outstanding and rare example of an Art Moderne-style double-residence, and under Criterion B for its association with the successful brothers Frank and Harvey Ablah.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

<u>Section 9</u>	<u>Page 18</u>	<u>Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House</u>	<u>Sedgwick County, Kansas</u>
		<u>Name of property</u>	<u>County and State</u>

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

<u>Section 9</u>	<u>Page 19</u>	<u>Frank J. and Harvey J. Ablah House</u>	<u>Sedgwick County, Kansas</u>
		<u>Name of property</u>	<u>County and State</u>

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Wichita City Building Inspection Logbook, 1938-1960. City of Wichita, Metropolitan Area Planning Department (MAPD), 455 N. Main, Wichita, KS.

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Donald Ablah to Barbara Hammond, Wichita Historic Preservation Office, Aug 28, 2007.

Amil Ablah to Barbara Hammond, Wichita Historic Preservation Office, Aug 30, 2007.



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Sedgwick County, Kansas  
County and State

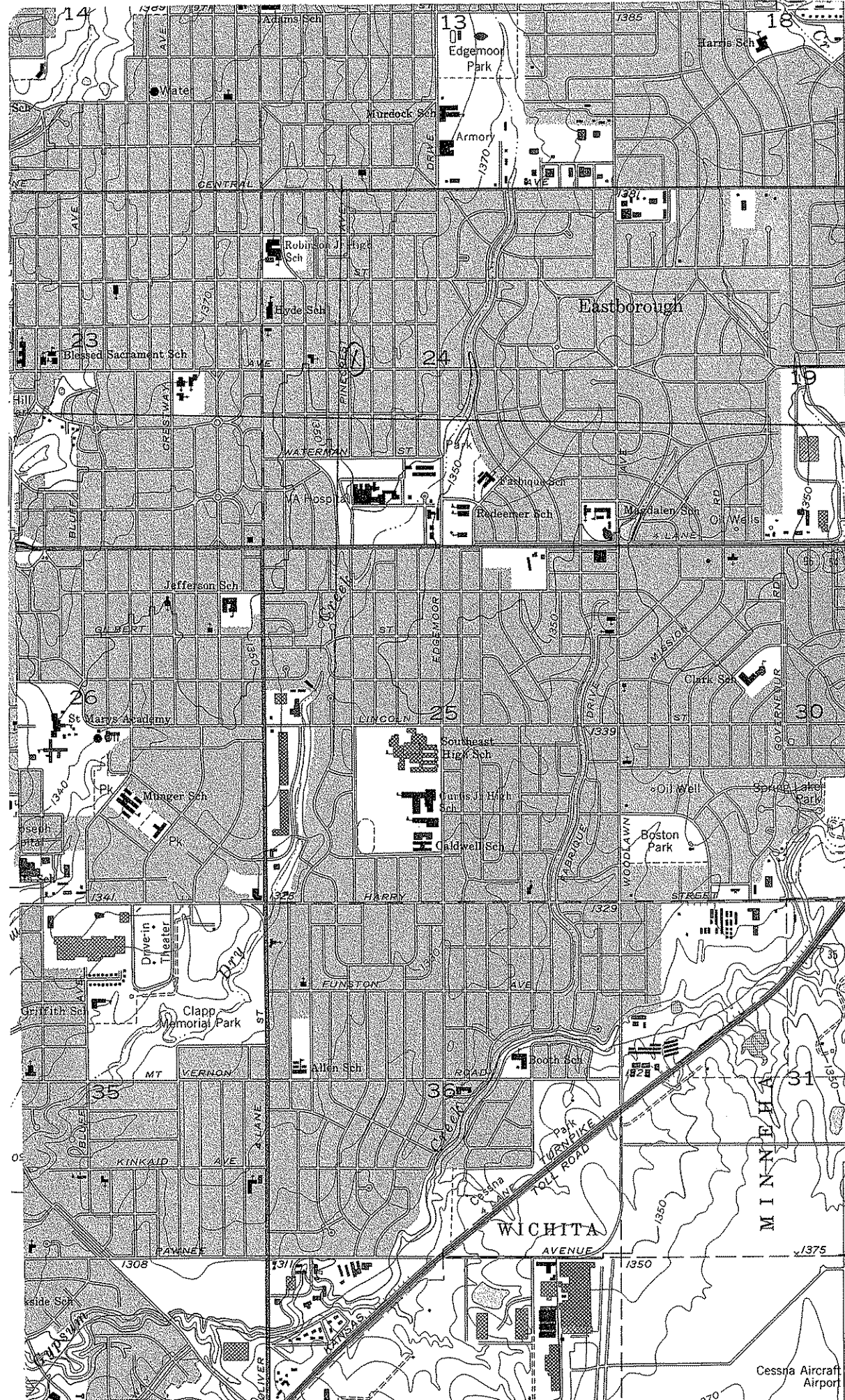
The nominated property is located on the northeast corner of Pinecrest and Douglas Avenues. The legal description of the property is Lot 18 and Lot 20, Easthill Addition.

The nominated property includes the parcels historically associated with the Ablah House.

Kathy L. Morgan, Photographer  
Date of Photographs: August 2006

1. West elevation (front), looking east
2. East elevation with upper deck, looking west
3. East elevation with carport, looking west
4. East elevation with upper deck, looking southwest
5. North elevation with carport, looking southwest

6. Entrance into south residence
7. Newel cap on banister with built-in pipe rack, north residence
8. Interior front door: common foyer beyond door leads to both residences
9. View of original door and trim, north residence
10. Arched doorway in kitchen, north residence
11. Dining room with concave plaster molding, north residence
12. Dining room, showing curved glass block window, south residence
13. Bathroom
14. Window trim, north residence
15. Interior arched doorway, south residence
16. Bathroom, south residence
17. Living room with curved glass block windows, north residence
18. Second floor hall, south residence



Franks and Harvey  
Ablah House  
102-04 N. Pinecrest  
Z 145  
E 652050  
N 4172260

4173  
(ANDOVER)  
6559 II NW  
4172  
LINWOOD ACRES 2.6 MI.  
EL DORADO 32 MI.  
40'  
EAST WICHITA INTERCHANGE 1.3 MI.  
EL DORADO INTERCHANGE 22 MI.

T. 27 S.  
T. 28 S.  
4168

Cessna Aircraft  
Airport